



## Safe Harbor News

### Grant to enhance woodpecker habitat

Reprinted from The Fayetteville Observer. Written by Nomee Landis

SOUTHERN PINES - Red-cockaded woodpeckers already forage on Dale and Barbara S. Simpson's land off Pee Dee Road.

Barbara Simpson said she hopes a \$16,560 grant from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service will help make the property, called Whitehall, even more enticing to the endangered birds. She wants to see them nest there again.

A tall, wide longleaf pine offers evidence of the birds' presence. Way up the trunk, a small round hole is visible. Sap stains beneath it are telltale signs of previous nesting.

The Simpsons will receive one of 113 grants from the wildlife service's new Private Stewardship Program. In all, \$9.4 million will be distributed to individuals and groups around the country. The grants are for conservation projects on private lands where endangered or threatened species live.

Barbara Simpson, a veterinarian who specializes in animal behavior, said the money will be used for clearing and burning on 149 acres. Managed burns will clear out the understory, which has grown thick with scrub oaks and other trees and shrubs. The woodpeckers prefer to nest in uncluttered longleaf pine forests because they can more easily spot predators.

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Photo by Stephanie Bruce

Barbara S. Simpson has received a grant from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to restore nearly 150 acres for the preservation of the red-cockaded woodpecker.

### Wildlife Habitat Enhancement Program



The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) is a voluntary program that encourages creation of high quality wildlife habitats that support wildlife populations of National, State, Tribal, and local significance. Through WHIP, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides technical and financial assistance to landowners and others to develop upland, wetland, riparian, and aquatic habitat areas on their property. WHIP is reauthorized in the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Farm Bill). Through WHIP, NRCS works with private landowners and operators; conservation districts; and Federal, State, and Tribal agencies to develop wildlife habitat on their property. Funding for WHIP comes from the Commodity Credit Corporation.

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Occasional burns also increase the diversity of plant species and promote the growth of the natural longleaf pine and wire grass ecosystem.

It is an important project, Barbara Simpson said, because large tracts of undeveloped land are becoming scarce around Southern Pines. The Simpsons' property, which includes 57 acres that are permanently protected from development, lies between other critical woodpecker habitats. And some birds nest on an adjoining piece of land.

**Safe Harbor  
Agreements  
78 Landowners  
40,531 acres**

### Benefits to people

Proper management of the land also will benefit people, Simpson said. A two-mile trail winds through the trees on the property. It is popular with local hikers and bicyclists, schools, and church groups. Frequent burns will reduce the fuel available on the forest floor, too. That will make any naturally ignited fires less dangerous.

The Simpsons bought Whitehall in 1999. It had been zoned for high-density residential uses, and condominiums were planned for the land, Simpson said. The previous owner was a founding member of the Sandhills Area Land Trust, Simpson said, and he wanted to see it protected.

The Simpsons belong to several conservation programs, including the N.C. Natural Heritage Program, the Safe Harbor Program and the N.C. Stewardship Program.

"It is worth protecting because of its location," Barbara Simpson said, "because of its human use and for its animal habitat.

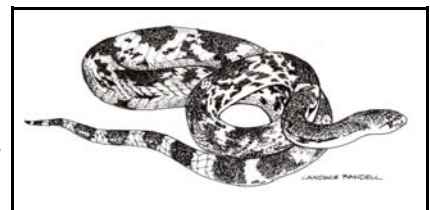
"I'd like to develop a really nice example of the native longleaf pine-wire grass system," Simpson said. If that natural system is functioning, she added, the red-cockaded woodpeckers will return.

## Northern Pine Snake/Southern Hognose Snake Project

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is interested in knowing more about all the rare species associated with the longleaf pine ecosystem. Through this knowledge and understanding of habitat requirements of rare species, we hope to prevent listing more species as Federally endangered. Through the Sandhills Safe Harbor Program the Service is reaching out to private landowners who are interested in helping researchers learn about these species of concern and their habitat requirements.

Reduction of the historic range of the longleaf pine forest from 93 million acres to less than 3 million acres remaining today in the southeastern U.S. has been well documented. Losses in numbers and diversity of vertebrate species adapted to this fire-dependent ecosystem have also, unfortunately, occurred. Perhaps the most often studied species of animal to be affected by this habitat reduction and degradation is the red-cockaded woodpecker. However, many other animal species continue to be negatively impacted by man's increasing use of this habitat type. The cumulative loss of these species must be curtailed before permanent harm occurs to the successful functioning of the entire ecosystem. Few animal species in this ecosystem face as many potential and actual threats as the Northern pine snake (*Pituophis melanoleucus melanoleucus*) and the Southern hognose snake (*Heterodon simus*) both listed as Federal species of concern.

David Woodward of North Carolina State University is currently working on a research project to describe habitat requirements and other important life history components necessary for both snake



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## Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program con't

### **Benefits**

Since WHIP began in 1998, nearly 11,000 participants have enrolled more than 1.6 million acres into the program. Most efforts have concentrated on improving upland wildlife habitat, such as native prairie, but there is an increasing emphasis on improving riparian and aquatic areas. The 2002 Farm Bill greatly expands the available tools for improving wildlife habitat conditions across the Nation. Species that have benefited from WHIP activities include the grasshopper sparrow, bobwhite quail, swift fox, short-eared owl, Karner-blue butterfly, gopher tortoise, Louisiana black bear, Eastern collared lizard, Bachman s sparrow, ovenbird, and acorn woodpecker.

### **How WHIP Works**

Conservation districts convene local work groups to identify local wildlife habitat priorities. The local work groups then provide input to the State Technical Committee that advises the State conservationist in the development of a State WHIP plan. The State WHIP plan serves as a guide for the development of the State WHIP ranking criteria. Persons interested in entering into a cost-share agreement with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to develop wildlife habitat may file an application at any time. Participants voluntarily limit future use of the land for a period of time, but retain private ownership. NRCS works with the participant to develop a wildlife habitat development plan. This plan becomes the basis of the cost-share agreement between NRCS and the participant. NRCS provides cost-share payments to landowners under these agreements that are usually 5 to 10 years in duration, depending upon the practices to be installed. There are shorter-term agreements to install practices that are needed to meet wildlife emergencies, as approved by the NRCS State conservationist. NRCS also provides greater cost-share assistance to landowners who enter into agreements of 15 years or more for practices on essential plant and animal habitat. NRCS can use up to 15 percent of its available WHIP funds for this purpose. NRCS does not place limits on the number of acres that can be enrolled in the program or the amount of payment made; however, some States may choose to establish such requirements. NRCS welcomes projects that provide valuable wildlife habitat and does not want to discourage any landowner who desires to implement practices that will improve habitat conditions for declining species. NRCS continues to provide assistance to landowners after completion of habitat development activities. This assistance may be in the form of monitoring habitat practices, reviewing management guidelines, or providing basic biological and engineering advice on how to achieve optimum results for targeted species. Applications are accepted through a continuous sign-up process. Applications may be obtained and filed at any time with your local USDA Service Center or conservation district office. Applications also may be obtained through USDA's e-gov Internet site at: [www.sc.egov.usda.gov](http://www.sc.egov.usda.gov). Enter Natural Resources Conservation Service in the Agency field, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program in the Program Name field, and CCC-1250 in the Form Number field. Applications also may be accepted by cooperating conservation partners approved or designated by NRCS.

### **For More Information**

If you need more information about WHIP, please contact your local USDA Service Center, listed in the telephone book under U.S. Department of Agriculture, or your local conservation district. Information also is available on the World Wide Web at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmbill/2002/>

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Harnett county	Parks Blake - (910) 893-7584
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## Pine Snake/Hognose Research con't

species to remain a viable part of the Sandhills longleaf pine ecosystem. The Sandhills is an area of increasingly intense residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, recreational and military use. These activities, in addition to the probable continuation of illegal collection for the pet trade, subject the remaining populations of each of these snakes from this region to unknown impacts.

The habitat requirements of pine and hognose snakes in the Sandhills region of North Carolina will be determined through tracking of surgically-implanted, radio-transmitted animals following standard procedures. Current plans are to capture, implant and release back at the capture sites up to 6 adults of each species of snake. Fieldwork will take place on lands owned and managed by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (Gordon Sandhills Gamelands tract) or on nearby similarly managed tracts.

A diversity of capture and release sites should help in understanding whether these species can co-exist successfully in close proximity to man's activities or must have large expanses of undisturbed habitat. The diversity and size of habitats found in the Safe Harbor program are critical to the success of locating and studying both snake species on private lands. In fact, the observation and protection of these two snakes on private lands may be found to be the most efficient and effective method of collecting long term data on individual animals. Safe Harbor tracts are also very important to this study in that they are located in "developed" and developing areas frequented by people and the myriad of human activities that both pine snakes and southern hognose snakes will have to endure if these species are to remain a part of the Sandhills ecosystem as a whole.

If you have seen either of these species on your property please call David Woodward at (919) 515-1980 or Jeff Beane (919) 733-7450 ext.754 so they can record the snake's location for this project.

